[English]

Indian Workforce

376. PROF. PREM SINGH CHANDUMAJRA : Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state :

(a) whether attention of Government has been drawn to the news-item captioned, "Indian Workforce is most competitive in Asia" appearing in the *Times of India* dated October 14, 1996;

(b) if so, the facts and details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to bring further improvement in the efficiency of Indian workforce?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The news-item captioned "Indian workforce is most competitive in Asia" published in the Times of India dated October 14, 1996 is based on a study by Hong Kong based consulting firm excerpted in the London Economist. The summary of the report is that while Indian workforce is most cost competitive in terms of cost of Labour, it is not so competitive in terms of quality of skilled labour.

(c) Apart from encouragement to introduce modern technology to make Indian industry internationally competitive, the Government has taken initiatives to augment the skill and productivity of workers which include specialised training programmes for workers through the Central Board of Workers Education, proposals for linkage of wages with productivity and training of workers through various Regional Centres of the National Productivity Council.

[Translation]

Local Telephone Call in Hilly Areas

377. SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the arrangements made for Local Telephone calls by keeping in view the geographical situation of the hilly areas;

(b) whether such arrangements have been made on the basis of Tehsil or Development Blocks or on the basis of some specific place; and

(c) the details with regard to this policy?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) No special arrangements have been made for hilly areas in regard to Local Calls. However, long distance calls between two short distance charging areas which generally correspond to a tehsil, are charged at the pulse rate of 180 seconds. for 30 kms. for hilly areas, instead of 20 kms. for plain areas.

(b) For purpose of call charges, the country has been divided into Long Distance Charging Area (LDCA) and Short Distance Charging Area (SDCA) where LDCA/ SDGA generally represents one or more revenue district/ Tehsil respectively. The some policy is applicable for hilly areas also.

(c) The Group dialling calls with reference to (a) are charged at 180 sec. pulse rate provided both called short distance charging centre and calling short distance charging centre are located at an elevation of minimum of 1000 meters above mean sea level and are within 30 kms. radial distance.

[English]

Modernisation of SAIL

378. DR. M. JAGANNATH : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) the total production of crude steel in the country and SAIL's market share thereof; and

(b) the steps taken to modernise SAIL to get better and improved production with cost reduction?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) Out of a total production of 21.942 million tonne of crude steel in the country during the year 1995-96, SAIL including IISCO has produced 10.637 million tonne.

(b) SAIL has undertaken modernisation of its three existing integrated steel plants at Durgapur, Rourkela and Bokaro with the objectives of Technological Upgradation, attaining higher productivity, economy in cost of productivity, economy in cost of production, energy conservation, improvements of yield and reduction of environmental pollution. The steps to modernise inter alia involve phasing out of Open Hearth Furnaces, introduction of latest BOF technology, adoption of continuous casting in place of ingot route, improvement in productivity by restoration of health of plants and equipment and optimum utilisation of capacity, etc.

[Tanslation]

Fire in Benzal Plant

379. PROF. RITA VERMA : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) whether Benzal Plant (By-product) at Bokaro steel plant caught fire during the current year;

(b) if so, the cause of fire and the loss suffered due to this fire accident;

(c) whether the production work has been resumed in Benzal Plant;

(d) if so, the details thereof;